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Adams Cross-Examined in CBS Case

By M. A. FARBER

Lawyers for Gen. William C. Westmoreland yesterday attempted to show that, contrary to a disputed 1982 CBS documentary, the general had not suppressed higher estimates in 1967 for Vietcong "irregular" forces.

Samuel A. Adams — whose thesis of military "deception" underlies the broadcast that is the subject of General Westmoreland's \$120 million libel suit in Federal District Court in Manhattan — testified that virtually the same figures that were said to have alarmed the general were, nonetheless, widely distributed by his command to American intelligence agencies.

The numbers were "certainly similar," Mr. Adams acknowledged under cross-examination by David Dorsen, a lawyer for General Westmoreland. However, he had testified earlier, those numbers were not ultimately used.

Mr. Adams, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst who served as a paid consultant to CBS and is now a defendant at the 14-week-old trial of the general's suit, took the stand last Thursday.

A key witness for CBS, he had testified on direct examination that General Westmoreland had imposed an arbitrary ceiling of 300,000 on reports of enemy size in 1967, partly by masking the strength of the political cadre and of such "irregular" forces as the guerrillas and the self-defense units.

Mr. Adams, who took part in 1967 in a quarrel between the military and the C.I.A. over the proper estimates for enemy strength, seemed uneasy under cross-examination. He fidgeted with his hands and arms, and the prodigious memory he displayed on direct examination failed him a number of times as Mr. Dorsen pursued discrepancies between his testimony and other statements he had made.

For example, Mr. Adams had said last week that he first realized the C.I.A. had "sold out" to lower estimates advanced by the military when he returned to Washington in September 1967 from a conference on strength figures in Saigon. He said he had left the conference after two or three days.

But George Carver, Mr. Adams's former superior, had previously testified that Mr. Adams was aware in Saigon of the "compromise" between the C.I.A. and the military. And yesterday, Mr. Dorsen read excerpts from a book Mr. Adams has been writing for a decade in which he says that, on the night he learned of the agreement, he attended a party in Saigon and "pounded the table, cursed the military and drank too much."

General Westmoreland commanded American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968.

The CBS documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," asserted that, to show progress in the war, the general's command engaged in a "conspiracy" to minimize the size and nature of the enemy, mainly by deleting the self-defense forces from the official military listing of enemy strength known as the order of battle. It said that "critical" intelligence on the scope of enemy forces had been "suppressed and altered."

General Westmoreland contends that the broadcast defamed him by saying that, for political and public relations reasons, he had lied to President Johnson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also denies charges made by the documentary that he had ignored reports by his intelligence officers of a larger Vietcong presence in 1967 and of a higher rate of North Vietnamese infiltration than he made known.

The general testified that, when he ordered the removal of the self-defense forces from the order of battle in the fall of 1967, it was because he had come to believe that those units were insignificant militarily and that their inclusion at a number much higher than used before would mislead Washington and the press. The part-time, hamlet-based self-defense forces, officially estimated until early 1967 at approximately 70,000, were considered thereafter to number around 120,000.

On Paper, Strength Fell

In mid- to late 1967, when a special estimate was being prepared for the President at a series of conferences like the one in Saigon, Mr. Adams and some C.I.A. colleagues favored a total figure for enemy strength of about 500,000, including the self-defense forces. The military argued not only that the self-defense forces should no longer be counted but also that the political cadre of about 85,000 should be listed separately. Thus, on paper, the total military strength of the enemy fell from 298,000 in May 1967 to a range of 223,000 to 248,000 in November.

Through a variety of contemporaneous memorandums and cables, Mr. Dorsen sought to demonstrate that a number of C.I.A. officials and analysts in 1967, including Mr. Adams, believed that the self-defense forces did not pose an offensive military threat and should not be considered in the same league with regular enemy troops. But Mr. Adams insisted that the self-defense forces were responsible for many casualties incurred through mines and booby traps they had laid.

Mr. Adams testified that, as early as March 1967, Maj. Gen. Phillip B. Davidson Jr., General Westmoreland's chief of intelligence, informed the C.I.A. that, as a result of new studies, the enemy's "irregular" forces, including guerrillas, were thought to number about 198,000.

Mr. Dorsen then showed Mr. Adams his testimony in 1975 before a Congressional committee in which he recalled a May 1967 episode involving General Westmoreland, which was also recounted in the documentary. The details of the episode had been furnished Mr. Adams by Col. Gains Hawkins, who was General Davidson's order-of-battle chief.

According to Mr. Adams, Colonel Hawkins said that when General Westmoreland was told at a briefing of the higher estimates for the "irregulars," as well as for the political cadre, he "nearly fell off his chair," and his "jaw went slack, with almost sort of a catatonic look." The general, by this account, said, "What am I going to tell the press, what am I going to tell Congress, what am I going to tell the President?" Then, according to Mr. Adams, he said: "Gentlemen, I want you to take another look at those numbers."

Colonel Hawkins, who also appeared on the CBS broadcast, is expected to testify that he interpreted that command as an order to make "arbitrary" cuts in the figures. Through depositions read into the record by CBS lawyers, four former intelligence officers have already testified that such reductions were carried out.

Figure Seen at Conference

But yesterday, Mr. Adams conceded that Colonel Hawkins and other officers representing General Westmoreland at an enemy strength conference at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va., in August 1967 may have shown a figure for "irregular" forces that was as high as 183,000. Even though the military opposed the inclusion of such a figure in the order of battle or in the estimate for the President, it was contained in one or more of the slides shown at the conference, attended by delegates from a half-dozen intelligence agencies.

The documentary said that General Westmoreland "chose not to inform the Congress, the President, not even the Joint Chiefs of Staff" of the higher estimates for the "irregulars." But Brig. Gen. George Godding has testified that he briefed the Joint Chiefs in August 1967 on the numbers advocated by both the C.I.A. and the military, and that Gen. Earle G. Wheeler concurred in General Westmoreland's decision to delete the self-defense forces.

Yesterday Mr. Dorsen pointed out that, at the Pentagon Papers trial of Daniel Ellsberg in 1973, Mr. Adams himself had testified that General Wheeler favored dropping the self-defense forces. Mr. Adams said he could not understand how he had said that, because he did not know General Wheeler's position before this case.

Mr. Dorsen also read the names of five senior intelligence officials, including Richard Helms, then Director of Central Intelligence, who had "signed off" on the accord with the military — after the Board of National Estimate listened to Mr. Adams discuss his reservations for two hours.

But Mr. Adams said that it was a "sad day," and that one board member, Sherman Kent, said: "Sam, it makes my blood boil to see the military cooking the books. Haven't we gone beyond the bounds of reasonable dishonesty?"

"And I said," Mr. Adams recalled, "we went beyond those bounds last August."